

FRIBA OF RAWA*

Life sketch of martyred Meena, founding leader of RAWA

Meena was born in 1957 in an ordinary family in Kabul. From a very young age she felt pained when she saw women suffering from violence, racial discrimination and other kinds of violence. She turned to political books and stories when she was still in class eight. She remembered the books written by John Lofiet, Jack London and sociology books by Iranian writers as the earliest resources that enlightened her thinking and made her believe that studying the problems and remedies of her backward society are the prime objectives and responsibilities before her. Her family like other ordinary families neither created hurdle in her way nor encouraged her.

In 1973, Daud ousted the Zahir monarchy in a coup but the grip of despotism and suffocation got tautened more firmly than before. With the vast political knowledge that she had gained by that time, Meena analyzed the situation and realized right away that changing the names doesn't mean changing the system. The engagement of women in the student demonstrations and resistance movements converged her attention to think about the women and their role in the pro-freedom and anti-despotism movement. She asserted that women have the audacity and capability to wade into any movement and this was the chief reason that drove her to have a separate organization for the women in the country.

* RAWA (The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) was founded in Kabul, in 1977, by a group of women intellectuals led by Meena. Ten years later Meena was murdered in Quetta, Pakistan, by KGB Afghani agents. RAWA is a political organization committed to defend and support human rights, women'

After primary school, she got admission in Malalai Girls High School. The time at the high school was a great experience for Meena. Her history teacher was a particular inspiration for Meena. She talked about the backwardness of the society where men and women were unequal and women suffered all kinds of injustice, from domestic violence to lack of healthcare facilities. She particularly remembered her teacher explaining to her students the meanings of democracy, despotism, struggle, party, politics, poor and rich classes in a lucid language. She had a keen interest in those lectures which also taught the students that they have a duty of standing against tyranny. Meena at this time realized she had to do something for the women and found education as a key to emancipation of them. She finished high school in 1975.

Meena was very alert about political issues. In the late 60s and early 70s, students in Kabul and other cities were deeply engaged in

rights, democracy, secular state and social justice in Afghanistan. RAWA's members have always been working, and still work, under extremely difficult conditions in a fiercely hostile environment. The issues of girls' education and free health care hold the top position in their agenda. They work within the Afghani refugees community in Pakistan (when the Russian army invaded Afghanistan in 1979, millions of Afghani poured across the borders into Pakistan and still live there).

L'Associazione Rivoluzionaria delle Donne Afgane (RAWA) è nata a Kabul nel 1977 per iniziativa di un gruppo di donne intellettuali sotto la leadership di Meena. Dieci anni dopo Meena fu assassinata a Quetta, in Pakistan, da agenti afgani del KGB. RAWA è un'organizzazione impegnata nella lotta politica per i diritti umani, per i diritti delle donne, la democrazia, la laicità dello stato e la giustizia sociale in Afghanistan. Nonostante abbiano dovuto lavorare, e continuano a lavorare, in una situazione molto difficile e a loro fortemente ostile, le donne di RAWA conducono una intensa azione politica e sono impegnate in diverse attività sociali, dall'istruzione alla salute: scuole clandestine –specialmente per l'educazione delle ragazze– e diritto alle cure sanitarie dei più poveri. RAWA mantiene una forte presenza nella comunità dei rifugiati afgani in Pakistan: dopo l'invasione sovietica del 1979 milioni di rifugiati afgani hanno vissuto in Pakistan e molti ancora lo fanno. [N.d.R.]

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Meena rientra in Pakistan nei primi anni '80, ma negli anni successivi farà poi avanti e indietro fra Pakistan e Afghanistan, fino al 1987 quando viene assassinata. Dopo il congresso del partito socialista francese il suo volto diventa noto a tutti. Per questo motivo, da allora, nessuna delle attiviste più in vista di RAWA si fa mai riprendere o fotografare in viso. La biografia di Meena è scritta da Melody Ermachild Chavis, *Meena, heroine of Afghanistan. The martyr who founded RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan*, New York (N.Y), St. Martin's Press, 2003. [N.d.R.]

social activism, uprisings and mass movements. Meena was greatly influenced by that situation and got familiar with the posters, slogans and rallies. The clamorous of “down with” and “long live” constantly rang in her ears and raised many questions in her mind.

The despotic and corrupted era of the Daud government had at its back the silence and sinking of student rallies. The absence of a democratic atmosphere drove many political organizations and worker unions to underground activities. Meena, by this time, had no organizational duty and reserved most of her time to the study of political, philosophical, sociological and literary books. *The Epic of Resistance* by Ashraf Dihquany, a woman who belonged to the *Devoted Partisan of the People of Iran*; and many other books about Jamila Bopasha, Jan de Arc and other famous freedom-fighting women affected her the most. These are the exact words that she had spoken, «We can oppose this or that point of view of Ashraf Dihquany but I do believe that everyone would admire her devotion, braveness and heroic firmness and would regard her as an example for them.» She was also influenced by women such as Malalai Maiwand and Rabia Balkhi, two Afghan women who played a significant role in the history of the Resistance in Afghanistan.

In 1976 she was admitted to the Shariat (Islamic Law) faculty of Kabul University. University had a great importance for her; it was a gathering center of conscious and political youth and she could easily get nearer to such movement. In her two years and few months in the university she was thinking over the establishment of a women's organization which would be the advanced detachment of the women's movement for democracy and women's rights. In 1976, she married Dr. Faiz Ahmed, the leader of a secret left-wing group, Afghanistan Liberation Organization.

In pursuit of her cause for gaining the right of freedom of expression and conducting political activities, Meena laid the foundation of RAWA in 1977. This organization was meant to give voice to the deprived and silenced women of Afghanistan. She contacted some trusted friends and a teacher and told them about the idea. The founding members of RAWA drafted the aims of the organization as fighting for democracy, equality and social justice for women, and secularism. They would also struggle for the basic rights of women like education, legal rights, health care, and freedom from violence and poverty.

In April 1978, Russia brought forth their picked-up stooges into power through a bloody coup. Those years witnessed the killing of thousands of politicians who were in organizations other than in

Khalq and Parcham; intellectuals, lawyers and doctors. Meena knew well that coup would pave the way for the complete dependence of the country to the Soviets. Protests and oppositions to the Russian-installed regime was gaining momentum day by day. Meena felt that prior to all, women power has to be motivated and RAWA must shoulder this historical responsibility to bring the women together and organize them to struggle against the puppet regime.

Despite her hatred to the *burqa*, Meena used to wear it while going out because it could save her from being recognized by her enemy. Meena's intense activities in those years had an important part for extending RAWA's sphere of activities and assembling women. She met many women and talked to them about the current situation and what needed to be done. She stressed on women to be active in all fields of life and do their work independently without relying on men. She taught them to oppose the male-dominated traditions of their society and overcome their weaknesses. The history of Afghanistan can hardly witness a woman with such firmness, confidence and self-reliance in her political and organizational activities.

The outstanding attractive personality, influential speech and igneous faith that glowed from Meena collected many followers and friends around her. It was certain that her entrance to any door would lead the girls to love her. Some mothers showed so much affection to her in their first look that they let their daughters join RAWA's membership. They put their every possession at her disposal and even offered money as donation for the needy families. One of the mothers said to her daughter while Meena was still alive, «My daughter, the most honorable and respectable way to follow is the way Meena is going through and I will not forgive you if you deviate from this way.»

Despite her pregnancy in 1978, she was working round the clock. It is something peculiar in Afghanistan that a pregnant woman works, or even more so, gets involved in political activities. Meena said, «I want to prove in practice that pregnancy shouldn't paralyze women nor provide them with an excuse to prevent them from performing their duties.» Those women and girls who were watching Meena with a baby in her womb working constantly were fascinated by her more than ever and wanted to serve her in any way.

In 1979 the "puppet regime opened fire against the mob to knock down the protest of a large number of women who had gathered in front of horrific Pul-i-Charkhi prison for visiting and knowing the whereabouts of their children, husbands, fathers and brothers. RAWA flayed this heinous act by releasing a night-leaflet and distributing it throughout Kabul. In the leaflet, besides defend-

ing the demands of the women, RAWA invited all women to the struggle against the murderous puppet regime. In fact, with that leaflet RAWA aimed to actualize its existence as a mass organization striving for the liberation of people from the yoke of aggressors. Since then, RAWA maintained its sensitivity to the important issues by spreading leaflets in the most suffocating situations.

Cracks appeared in the puppet regime as clashes and differences were getting intense within the regime factions. Hafizullah Amin smashed away his rivals and snatched the power. Rebellions and revolts against the regime had spread through out the country. To tighten the grip over power, Amin's tyrant regime put thousands of revolutionaries into prison including Meena's husband. At the same time, on 5th August 1979, Meena gave birth. The news of her husband's arrest and the execution of her husband's friends drowned Meena into an ocean of distresses and sorrows; but her iron determination and strong willpower didn't let her trample down. She had to move house to avoid being trapped by the police. Ignoring her pain and weakness she shifted all important documents from her house to another place.

Meena's baby girl was brought up in a family that had no blood-relation with her parents. Meena was so engaged in her political activities that she couldn't find a chance to see her baby. Only when she came to Pakistan she found the opportunity to take her baby in her bosom who couldn't recognize her as her mother anymore.

Aggravating pressure, reign of terror and willful executions couldn't save the dummy regime of Amin from trampling down. The hatred and disgust of the people against the bloodthirsty regime of Amin indicated that a rebellion was to occur and Russians soon realized that their puppet regime was no longer able to hold the power. Moscow found the remedy in military aggression. In December 1979 Afghanistan was occupied by hundreds and thousands of troops of the Red Army.

The blitzing Soviet invasion gave people a sudden smack. In contrast to many intellectuals who had been frustrated and disappointed, Meena seemed to be hammered out in such a way that no force or fallout could bend her, and she stood firmly against the Russian aggression. She felt a huge responsibility: she was the hope for thousands of her fellow country women. She knew that the appearance of even a very small crack in her struggle would fade out the enthusiasm and passions of thousands of women.

Despite scores of adversities –like having epilepsy, that tormented her for many years and now had brought her under more severe constant attacks in short intervals of time– and in spite of

the grief for her husband's friends who had been executed by the Amin regime, in spite of the probability of being caught, of being away from her child, of lack of finance, and of thousands of other such problems, she swore to hold aloof the splendid banner she had hoisted and she lead the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan against the aggressive Russians without having any fear of shedding her blood.

She started a campaign against the Russian forces and their puppet regime in 1979 and organized numerous processions and meetings in schools, colleges and Kabul University in order to mobilize public opinion. As the grip of suffocation and suppression of aggressors and their stooges was getting stretched, the preparation of people for a national wide struggle against the Russian was getting extended all about the country. This mass movement cherished hopes for Meena and her colleague to confront with difficulties boldly and fearlessly and abstain from any flexibility in their attitude toward the Russian.

RAWA was in contact with the Kabul University and almost all the girls' schools. With her firm belief in woman power, Meena wished that this power was felt by people and this was a fine moment for the women to prove their undeniable existence in resistance war and their affection for freedom. She urged upon the schoolgirls to be vanguard in resistance in order to make their position more stable, and they responded on 29th April 1980 when thousands of them marched into the streets as an act of condemn towards the Russian invasion. RAWA had the key role in that rally and reflected the aims of the rally in the leaflet *The epic of our girls shook the Red Dragons* which was scattered through the city. The poem in the leaflet had been memorized by many schoolgirls.

For the purpose of propagating RAWA's views, aims and objectives, and to give Afghan women social and political awareness regarding their rights and potentials, Meena launched a bilingual (Persian/Pashtu) magazine called *Payam-e-Zan* (Woman's Message) in 1981. The first issue of *Payam-e-Zan* was released with the help of elementary devices as a condemnation to Russian's coup of 27th April and a tribute to the rebellion of the Kabul's girls of 28th April which was suppressed into blood. It was composed of ten pages, the front page of which was designed by a photograph of Nahid, a brave girl who had been martyred in a demonstration a year back. *I'll Never Return* the famous poem of Meena had also been jotted in. Due to the tough censor by the government and lack of access to paper *Payam-e-Zan* was confined to four issues only. Later on, it was resumed in Pakistan, which is still forging ahead.

RAWA had got worldwide recognition by this time. On October 22nd, 1981, the ruling French Socialist Party invited representatives from across the world for attending their congress party meeting. The Soviet delegation at the Congress headed by Boris Ponamaryev was present and also Meena was invited as the representative of anti-Russian resistance movement. While Meena was addressing the gathering, Ponamaryev and his colleagues shamefacedly left the hall as the participants gave a standing ovation when Meena started waving a victory sign. Meena became the focus of the French and International press and even the Pakistan radio which once abstained from broadcasting anything about RAWA, reported Meena's attendance at Valance Congress and defined her a "Afghan heroin". Meena participation in that meeting gave the resistance movement an unprecedented honor and legitimacy while the fundamentalists tried to ignore the active role of democratic and freedom-loving organizations in the resistance movement so that in this way they could have their domination over the movement and turn it to their political interest. Her participation was also an element of inspiring and courage for the women.

Beside France, she also visited several other European countries such as Norway, Belgium and Holland. Her tour lasted up to June 1981 during which she met with prominent government authorities and political personalities. In her press conferences and meetings, she highlighted the political and military situation in Afghanistan and the women's condition. She was the first one to make the world aware of the terrorist acts and backwardness of the fundamentalists.

RAWA realized from the very first day that the six month-trip of Meena would stir up the wrath of the fundamentalists because she has openly and bluntly brought out the real picture of them to the world. Her colleagues felt the danger from the fundamentalists therefore she was advised to stay in Europe but Meena refused: "I know that the treacherous fundamentalist misuse Islam for their heinous acts and have no respect for any democratic value but I want to tell them that my blood wouldn't bring anything to them but unveil their misogyny and brutalities." The insistence of her colleagues to make her stay in Europe for the treatment of her serious illness had no effect. She returned to Pakistan in June 1982.¹

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The Russian and their protégés were now laying for an opportunity to trap Meena who had been recognized by them as a leader of an active organization. Her photographs had been given to many intelligence authorities and scattered through out the police stations and checkpoints. Meena commented in this regard, «The Russians and the puppet regime are stabbing us to perish our organization and if they succeed in arresting me or the others, we would certainly face many difficulties. It is a practical ground for us to prove our valiance to prison, torturing or shedding of blood. This is the only way we can give courage to our people and crash the enemy power». She endeavored to bring RAWA to such a degree of stability that her arresting or any other accident causes no frustration. To expand RAWA's sphere of activities, she sent many girls to various provinces and she herself had many visits to different provinces. The history of Afghanistan can barely give an example of girls moving around different cities for political activities.

RAWA's anti-Soviet struggle earned it threats from the Soviets and their cronies. Many of RAWA's activists were jailed by the Russians and their puppets but due to the non-availability of reliable evidence they were released.

RAWA had got popularity and reliability in schools and university more than any other place due to its engagement with student out there. RAWA was able to organize a sector of its followers in Kabul University.

The condition in the country was getting worse in the late 80s and RAWA's leadership decided that Meena along with few others had to leave the country for Pakistan to escape more arrests of its leadership members by KHAD (the intelligence agency of the puppet regime). Meena escaped the police at a checkpoint narrowly as she was wearing a burqa and the police had not asked her to show her face by chance. The leadership committee was not taking any more risks.²

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² Since the time Meena died, RAWA's leadership has been held by a committee of ten women. Their identity and whereabouts are kept secret: even RAWA's eldest members don't know who they are. This is due to security reasons: would any of

Staying in exile in 1981, away from her homeland, people, beloved colleagues and from her only child opened a new chapter in her political life. It has been quoted by her close colleagues who had seen her in early days in Pakistan when Meena was weeping: «Maybe once I get the chance to see my child, husband and my family, it is not important. I got used to that loneliness. But being away from my country is something that really my heart is aching for. Recalling those years in my country fill me with acute nostalgia and vivid memories of uprising movements. Believe me, life for me would be worthless if I did not believe that my departure is solely for the benefit of my people and particularly of the women and RAWA's involvement in the great resistance war». Her colleagues realized that her work in exile had a great value for RAWA and the whole resistance movement.

Meena decided some tasks to be carried out in exile: set up an organization of RAWA abroad to interact with the refugees, establish close relation with pro-freedom organization of Pakistan and other countries, organize social activities in the field of education and medical care for women and children refugees. She achieved prosperous results in forwarding some of these programs.

Islamic parties, and Gulbaddin's Hezib-i-Islami in particular, were patronized and nurtured by Pakistan and the West during the war against the Russians and they opened their offices and headquarters in Peshawar city. The intellectuals and freedom fighters were hunting a resource to equip them with arms and ammunitions, but since the West invested on the fundamentalist parties, they were left behind with no one to help them. They came to Pakistan, if they could join the anti-Russian war front. But the Gulbaddin party and other fundamentalists created a terror and unrest atmosphere in Pakistan, and particularly in Peshawar city, to dissuade the intellectuals from their struggle. In such a situation Meena entered Peshawar and put her shoulder to the wheel for the great task she had decided. Analyzing accurately the condition in Pakistan she preferred Quetta city, as the center of her political activities.

them be caught, she couldn't provide any information on their identities nor would the organization collapse if any of its 10 leaders would be caught and killed.

Ai vertici di RAWA c'è un comitato di 10 donne che si è sostituito completamente a Meena dopo la sua morte. Queste donne mantengono scrupolosamente l'anonimato e, per motivi di sicurezza, pochissime persone ne conoscono l'identità. Persino la maggior parte delle più "vecchie" di RAWA non le conoscono, per un motivo molto semplice: se qualcuna fosse catturata non potrebbe svelare segreti. Se una delle dieci leaders venisse catturata e uccisa, ce ne sarebbero altre 9 e l'organizzazione non crollerebbe.[N.d.R.]

Despite the horrors and the political oppression, RAWA's appeal and influence increased in the years of the Soviet occupation and a growing number of RAWA activists were sent to work among refugee women. Meena was of the opinion that if RAWA could make a nest in the refugee camps and fulfill their demands it would be possible to assemble women and block the fundamentalists from penetrating in the camps. RAWA members were harassed many times by extremists but they continued working there. Meena personally went from tent to tent and shared the pain of the people - especially of the women- there.

Considering the fact that the fundamentalists paid no attention to the education of children in refugee camps, RAWA wished to establish schools, literacy course and hospitals. But the financial problem and lacking access to foreign aids made it hard to fulfill RAWA desires. Meena used to say that if RAWA had one hundredth of fund that each Afghan fundamentalist party had, it would set up tens of school, courses and hospitals and even universities but since all the NGOs, governments and international aid committees poured deluge of money in the pocket of fundamentalists and other parties RAWA couldn't do all that. It was in 1984 when Meena established two schools by the name of "Watan Primary School" for boys and girls, which later were promoted to become high schools. Meena always insisted on attending literacy courses regularly. She believed, "Without grasping knowledge women wouldn't be able to know the fundamentalists and carry on their struggle." She made a commission to compile textbooks for the schools and literacy courses, which were meant to evoke a sense of patriotism among the children. RAWA members who taught keenly without any salary had a major role in making RAWA popular among the refugee masses

For making RAWA's members politically aware of the world and Afghanistan's situation, Meena opened political classes which taught them Afghanistan's history and other subjects regarding political and military conditions of Afghanistan; the role of women in the war; human rights and women rights; experiences of other pro-independent and freedom movements and women's roles in those movements. A few of such classes were held by Meena herself.

Regarding the financial problem and self-assistance she said, "Without financial capability and self-assistance, we can't move ahead with our work. Staring at others for getting help doesn't bring hope." She agreed with some refugee families that a handicraft center such as embroidery, bead knitting, tailoring and carpet weaving must be set up in the camp to provide a mean through which they could

make ends meet. She placed a handicraft project in one of the refugee camps and employed scores of women. Many of RAWA members also took part in this project with great interest and avidity. This project was expanding day by day and turned to a reliable source of generating income. This helped the refugee women a great deal and also the women of RAWA who worked in the workshops.

Another great service rendered by Meena for the Afghan women was the establishment of a hospital in late 1987. The hospital was given the name of Malalai who was one of RAWA's leaders, imprisoned by the puppet regime and resisted all kind of tortures. Beside its main function, Malalai hospital provided Afghan women and girls nursing courses in which scores of girls and women learned the basic nursing and first aids activities. Unfortunately, Meena was not alive at that time to see that the hospital she had worked so hard to found was now giving free treatment to thousands of Afghan women and children daily and had turned into a well-known hospital among the refugees.

Hospital and school counted the most valuable help for the refugees and Meena was very happy for their establishment but all this was not free of hazards for RAWA. These places could serve as discovering places for Pakistan intelligent service which tried to recognize RAWA's members and like the Islamic parties wanted to get to know RAWA's secrets. It was beyond acceptance for the Pakistan authority that an independent women organization could exist in Afghanistan which was bound to a stubborn struggle against the Russians and their stooges, the Khalq and Parchum and had such uncompromising attitude towards the fundamentalists.

The emergence of RAWA as a women organization gave birth to the feminist movement in Afghanistan which, by this time, had grown up to a mass movement. The fundamentalist parties, which had been terrified by the blooming of the feminist movement, could see their own survival in depriving the movement from its leader. With their strong military power and countless ammunition, they knew that they could defeat Meena therefore they tried to draw a plot.

Meena was in Quetta on 12th November, 1986 when she was informed that her husband had been abducted in Peshawar by the gunmen of Gulbuddin's party. She had no doubt that her husband had lost his life at the very first hours. This was a backbreaking blow for her but her strong moral and firm faith in struggle didn't allow her to bend. She was suspicious that the murder of her husband might be a preface conspiracy, therefore she took tight security precautions and changed some houses. Many RAWA girls remember

that the grief which burned her heart never appeared on her face and as usual a smile could be seen on her lips. She encouraged others to be fearless, firm and not be disappointed. She referred to terrorist acts as indicator of enemy's weakness of enemy. A woman who was captivated by the firmness of Meena, expressed her feelings," When I observed that a women was working so keenly and passionately even when she had lost her husband, I swore that I will follow her path till I am alive."

RAWA's activities were on the normal track, teachers and students attended their school regularly and courses were getting strength by feeling Meena at their side. It seemed as if no event had occurred in the life of that firm and steeled woman. She used to go to school and sing with the students in their assembly and chat with women in workshops.

But her short life span, didn't give her much opportunity to lead RAWA in the crucial stages of struggle with her brilliant sense of responsibility and extraordinary character. The Russians, their puppets and the fundamentalists really felt Meena as their most effective and decisive enemy.

On 4th Feb 1987 Meena didn't arrive at her appointment on time. She always tried to be as punctual as possible. Hours went by but she still was out. Everyone got anxious and started searching. It was soon discovered that some of her close relatives, including her brother-in law and two of her sisters, were also missing in her house.³ The enemy spread a propaganda that she had fled with some amount of money.

The disappearance of Meena struck everyone like a dagger. Despite the sore pain that twisted everyone's heart, the majority of RAWA members vowed not to let the organization Meena had found trample down.

Contradictory news was spread about everywhere but it remained certain that it could be nothing but an insult to Meena if someone thought that she had left everything behind and fled.

It was in August, 1987 (six month after her disappearance) when a Pakistani newspaper reported that a few agents of KHAD (the secret police of the puppet regime) had been arrested with a truck full of explosives by the Pakistani police. RAWA recognized one of the captives: he had worked with Meena. Soon all false propagations were ended when the two criminals openly confessed before the poli-

³ Her brother in law betrayed her. Il marito della sorella la tradì. [N.d.R.]

ce that they had been involved in Meena's murder and had stolen the money and a few vehicles of RAWA. KHAD after welcoming them in Afghanistan had sent them back to Pakistan to explode bombs in certain places where RAWA was based. The treacherous KHAD agents trotted out everything before the Pakistani police and showed the place where they had buried Meena and her bodyguards.

When the police drew out the dead body of Meena, some RAWA members were present on the occasion: her face could be recognized clearly. Her hands were tied at her back, which showed that she had been stuffed after being tortured.

RAWA's great grief was refreshed again. The optimism of some RAWA members that Meena had gone somewhere and would return now ok faded away. The next day RAWA proclaimed the death of Meena by releasing a statement.

But the torture of RAWA members didn't end with their deprivation of their beloved leader. The Pakistani press after finding out about Meena's murderers and her dead body, started heinous propaganda against RAWA and marked it as an anti-Islamic organization fighting against Islamic parties. However, it was clear that no other harm could be more grief than the martyrdom of Meena. Two options were now left for RAWA, either to surrender themselves to the enemy or to follow the path of Meena by accepting all the sacrifices and difficulties. All members of RAWA chose the second option when reminded by the saying of Meena, "We can achieve our target only with fearless morals."

Though KHAD with the collaboration of fundamentalists put an end to the valuable and splendid life of a great politician woman of the country, they could never be able to cancel her thinking. RAWA is holding aloof the banner that Meena held and this is a proof to the defeat of the enemy. Meena's blood is flowing through the vein of each and every RAWA member; her memory and thinking are the moving spirits of RAWA.

Abstract: In questo contributo di Friba, una donna afghana membro di RAWA (The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan), si ricostruiscono la vita e le lotte di Meena, la fondatrice dell'associazione. Fin dal 1973 Meena aveva maturato la decisione di battersi per i diritti delle donne e contro ogni forma di tirannia. Influenzata da autori come Ashraf Dihquany e da personaggi di donne resistenti come Jamila Bopasha e Giovanna d'Arco, ma soprattutto dalle resistenti afghane Malalai Maiwand e Rabia Balkhi, dal 1976 studia alla Facoltà di Legge Islamica della Università di Kabul. Nello stesso 1976 sposa un leader di un'ala clandestina di sinistra della Afghanistan Liberation Organization, che verrà imprigionato nel 1979.

Nel 1977 pone le basi di RAWA, con lo scopo di dare finalmente voce alle donne afgane, di lottare per i loro diritti all'educazione, alla tutela legale, alla salute e alla libertà, liberandole dalla violenza e dalla povertà, e al tempo stesso per la democrazia, l'eguaglianza, la giustizia sociale e la laicità.

Attraverso le varie fasi del calvario afgano, Meena si batte per diffondere RAWA fra le donne. La sua personalità forte e determinata le conquista molte simpatie e adesioni, ma la repressione del regime è durissima.

Meena porta avanti la sua attività politica, affrontando duri sacrifici, soprattutto per le ripetute e prolungate separazioni dalla figlia. Nel 1981 fonda un giornale in Persiano e Pashtu «Payman e zan» (*Messaggio della donna*). Intanto Meena riceve riconoscimenti a livello internazionale e partecipa a incontri in varie città europee. Nonostante le gravi minacce rivoltele dai fondamentalisti islamici, rientra in patria, ma sarà poi costretta a rifugiarsi in Pakistan (prima a Peshawar poi a Quetta) per l'intensificarsi del pericolo di essere arrestata dal regime. Anche dall'esilio Meena continua il suo lavoro per RAWA, raggiungendo importanti risultati sia nelle relazioni con altri movimenti libertari, sia nel contrasto alla penetrazione delle organizzazioni fondamentaliste nei campi profughi, sia nell'assistenza a donne e bambini rifugiati, sia nell'istituzione di scuole, di laboratori e di un ospedale, benché non avesse la possibilità di accedere a finanziamenti internazionali, a differenza dei fondamentalisti e di altri partiti afgani.

Nonostante la lontananza dalla figlia e la perdita del marito, che nel 1986 verrà sequestrato a Peshawar e ucciso, Meena continua il suo lavoro con fermezza e ottimismo senza lasciarsi abbattere né scoraggiare, limitandosi a prendere alcune precauzioni, che però non impediscono ai suoi nemici di catturarla e farla sparire (grazie anche al tradimento di un parente). Nonostante il tentativo della propaganda afgana di far passare la sua sparizione per un tradimento, viene ben presto provato che Meena è stata catturata, torturata e uccisa da criminali assoldati dal KHAD, il servizio segreto del regime afgano.

Ora due alternative si aprono a RAWA: arrendersi al nemico o seguire l'esempio di Meena, continuando a combattere e accettando qualunque difficoltà, fino al sacrificio estremo -come Meena, uccisa a trent'anni nell'agosto del 1987. Tutte le sue militanti hanno scelto questa seconda alternativa, forti della memoria di Meena e del suo pensiero.

Keywords: Afghanistan, RAWA, Meena, donne afgane, diritti delle donne, tirannie, assistenza, scolarizzazione, memoria.

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